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SUBJECT: GOG PUSHES ELECTIONS TO END OF MAY, 2009

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. During a hastily convened meeting with the donor community, Prime Minister Souare seemed eager to convince the international community of the GoG's commitment to hold legislative elections as soon as possible. At the same time, the GoG distributed a draft elections planning timetable, which listed May 31 as the new election date. A heated inter-ministerial discussion suggests that financing issues continue to be a major stumbling block, although the PM assured the international community that the GoG would find the money to advance the electoral process. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) The Guinean Government's election steering committee summoned the diplomatic corps to a late afternoon meeting on short notice Friday, December 12, to explain recent electoral developments. Starting nearly 90 minutes late, the meeting lasted for several hours. France, the EU, Spain, Japan, ECOWAS and the UN were present. USAID Director represented the USG. Prime Minister Souare led the Guinean delegation which consisted of many ministers, perhaps most of the cabinet, including Finance, Reconciliation, Justice, Territorial Affairs, Decentralization, and Planning and Cooperation.

MAY 31 NOW THE TARGET DATE FOR ELECTIONS

¶3. (SBU) According to the Minister of Territorial Administration and Political Affairs (MATAP), most of the voter registration units (CARLES) are up and running, but there are still many districts that are not yet operational. The minister orally provided the group with detailed data on voter registration, but did not provide the diplomatic corps with copies of the report. A representative from the GoG's specialized team managing the voter registration process, which meets frequently and includes representatives of all major election donors, passed out an elections planning timetable that showed May 31 as elections day. (COMMENT. Guinee24.com reported on December 16 that the MATAP Minister had publicly announced the GoG's intent to hold elections on May 31. END COMMENT).

¶4. (SBU) The French Ambassador asked if the proposed timetable had accounted for the additional time needed to resolve the problems previously detailed by the MATAP Minister. The answer was yes. However, in response to a question from the Minister of Decentralization, the GoG acknowledged that it had not included the cost of registering Guineans abroad in its most recent budget projections. The GoG noted that the political parties were insisting that some 40 countries be included in this effort, but that MATAP and the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) had proposed only 18, admitting that the issue had not yet been resolved.

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

¶15. (SBU) The government representatives then started arguing among themselves over whether or not the GoG would be able to come up with the additional resources needed to fill the 2008 elections budget gap, which is some 14 billion Guinean francs, i.e., about \$3 million USD. The Prime Minister emphasized that the elections were the GoG's absolute top priority, by direct order of President Conte. The PM added that he was personally involving himself in the process and would be meeting with the MATAP and CENI daily to ensure implementation.

¶16. (SBU) However, the Finance Minister said that without some extraordinary revenue receipts in December, the GoG would not be able to financially commit to several crucial steps scheduled in the coming weeks. The PM hinted pointedly several times that he was hoping for some donors to step forward with additional resources; none of the diplomatic representatives indicated that they would. At one point, the UN coordinator suggested that they knock on other doors, such as Canada, pointing out that many donors were not represented at the meeting. The EU representative confirmed the EU's "political promise" to fill the 2009 gap, with some 6 million euros, but said she did not have the means to disburse any of these funds in advance.

¶17. (SBU) After much discussion, the Prime Minister said that he would find a way to allow the Ministry of Finance

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to make immediate commitments (thus booking the liability, despite lack of extraordinary receipts) for delivery of items that would not, in any event, require payments to be made until 2009. The CENI President, however, said that if the data operators and CARLES members were not paid in cash in December, implementation would be jeopardized.

NO QUESTION OF COMMITMENT

¶18. (SBU) The Prime Minister wrapped up the meeting by asking if anyone in the room had any doubt over the GoG's commitment to and prioritization of these elections. The EU and France spoke up, saying that while they were encouraged by the effort, it was important that the finance law be respected. The Finance Minister, at the PM's request, went to pains to assure everyone that, whatever they did, it would be legal.

COMMENT

¶19. (SBU) As has been the case with similar GoG elections meetings, the December 12 meeting was poorly organized and raised a number of concerns within the donor community. Despite the GoG's repeated assurances of its commitment to elections in the near term, issues raised during the meeting suggest that there are still several challenges to be overcome. The PM put on a good show of intent, and the gathered GoG representatives seemed sincere in their intent to hold to the May 31 date, provided the funding can be assured. However, financing continues to be a major stumbling block.

¶10. (SBU) PM Souare seemed uncharacteristically forceful throughout the meeting, often interrupting his Ministers and at one point pointedly denying permission for the Minister of Territorial Administration to begin speaking, after hearing the perfunctory "with your permission Mr.

Prime Minister.? He seems to have grown a bit more comfortable in his leadership shoes over the last several months. END COMMENT.

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